

Deadly superbug *Clostridium difficile* beaten using poo transplants from healthy people

By Jane Hansen
3-4 minutes

YOU can give it, take it or cop it. It can hit the fan and sometimes life forces you to eat a sandwich made from it, but it's also proving to be a cure for a deadly superbug.

With all the poo jokes out of the way, a dangerous strain of disease which can cause kidney failure and even death is being successfully treated with everyday bacteria found in the stools of healthy people.

Mutated by the overuse of broad-spectrum antibiotics, *Clostridium difficile* — a bacteria that can take over the intestines and destroy the bowel — kills up to 300 people a day in US hospitals and is now here in Australia.

Diseases caused by the rogue strain have been detected in NSW hospitals, but patients have been cured by an alternative treatment known as bacteriotherapy, or faecal transplant.

Healthy bacteria from a donor poo is transplanted into the colon of the sick patient with remarkable results.

"We have a 97 per cent cure rate with a single infusion of flora into the colon," said Professor Thomas Borody from The Centre for Digestive Diseases, which has so far conducted over 1500 transplants.

Robert Silberstein spent six months fighting *clostridium difficile* disease and none of the antibiotics thrown at him eliminated the bug. The 38-year-old lawyer had no options left after all treatments failed.

"I had relapse after relapse and it was fair to say there were no options," the Rose Bay father of three said.

He endured severe pain and constant diarrhoea as his colon was being destroyed by the toxins released by *C. difficile*.

Mr Silberstein's doctor, Royal North Shore infectious diseases specialist Dr Bernie Hudson, said his patient was either going to lose his colon or die, so he referred him to the Centre for Digestive Diseases for a faecal transplant.

The bacteria from the healthy donor stool took on the superbugs and overpowered them with almost immediate effect.

"I had the procedure done at midday and I woke that night and I felt completely normal, I was shocked," said Mr Silberstein.

"I'd been so ill for six months and I felt normal. The transplant was amazing, it worked."

"It has cured him," Dr Hudson said, adding he had several patients a month who would qualify.

Dr Hudson believes all NSW hospitals should equip themselves to perform the transplants to save lives.

"It is the ultimate pro-biotic treatment," said Thomas Riley, a professor of microbiology and immunology at the University of WA.

Faecal transplants are the butt of many a joke amongst the medical profession, but doctors say that should not distract from the success rate.

"Given the success rate with faecal transplant it probably should be used more often," said Professor Riley.